

FROM AN UNFINISHED NOTEBOOK: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH ON YAO IN CHIANG RAI

by

SIMON HALLIDAY

The death of Simon Halliday, killed in a road accident while heading on his motorbike for a Yao village in the vicinity of Mae Chan, reminds me of that, in 1935, of Wang T'ung-hui, the pioneer woman ethnographer among the Hua-lan Yao of Kuangsi; she had lost her way in the jungle while looking for help after her husband, Fei Hsiao-tung, had fallen into a tiger trap. Both accidental deaths, despite distance in time and technical progress in field work, bear the same striking features of personal sacrifice in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Thanks to Wang T'ung-hui's posthumous book¹, a record of the disappearing Hua-lan Yao of Kuangsi remains available to historians and anthropologists. Even if the issue is not so urgent for the Mien group of the Yao people, who have managed to survive by scattering widely in China, northern Viet Nam, Laos and Burma, Simon Halliday would have nonetheless contributed greatly to an accelerated and deep understanding of their highly sophisticated culture. His death has certainly deprived us of valuable achievements.

The following pages are but a crude summary of his studies and impressions during the first and only six months he spent among the Yao. Although in no sense conclusive, these notes provide us with a genuine selection of the Mien reality, according to what appeared most conspicuous to the promising young researcher. And as with traveller's notes of the past, an important source in anthropological research—which A. Walker² has revived by touring the field with students and publishing their impressions—even if they sometimes suffer from superficiality, they are also capable of contributing a great deal which is refreshing and original. As such Simon Halliday's first insights into Yao society will be all the more interesting for his fellow anthropologists.

Jacques Lemoine*

The major part of this material was collected in Baan Lao Tsi Kwe (named after the village headman), Amphoe Maechan, Changwat Chiang Rai. However, I have also made short excursions to the Yao villages of Phadua, Naung Waen (Paa Kaa), and Huenchampu (?), Amphoe Mae Chan, and Baan Mae Yao, Amphoe Muang.

Origin and composition of the Yao

The Yao are a scattered minority group in southern China, typically hill-dwelling, slash-and-burn agriculturalists. Recently (i.e. about 200 years ago) some have migrated south to the

* Research fellow, Centre Nationale de Recherche Scientifique, Paris (stationed at Chiang Mai).

¹ Wang T'ung-hui, *Hua-lan Yao shih-hui tsu-chih* ("Social Organization of the Hua-lan Yao"), (Shanghai, 1936).

² A.R. Walker, *Peasants in the Hills* (Penang, 1975).

highlands of Laos and Viet Nam, and in the past 200 years to the hills of northern Thailand as well. The Yao are divided into several tribes, and are distinguished by differences in custom, language and dress. As far as I know, all the Yao that have migrated to Thailand belong to the Lu Mien tribe—they often, in fact, simply refer to themselves as Mien, meaning ‘person’, as distinct from Kyan or ‘non-Yao’. ‘Lu’ may be an acknowledgment of the word ‘Yao’, and is probably of Chinese origin (cf. Gordon Downer, ‘Phonology of the word in Highland Yao’, *SOAS Bulletin*, vol. XXIV part 3, 1961). The Yao dialects are related to Miao, together with which they form a distinct language group, sharing an eight-tonal system. There appear to be several cultural similarities between Yao and Miao, but thorough comparative work has yet to be undertaken.

History and composition of Lao Tsi Kwe’s village

Lao Tsi Kwe was born in Laos, in the Baan Hue Sai area (i.e. on the other side of the Mekong river from Chiang Rai Province). His grandfather had moved back to Laos from Burma (Chientung) 28 years ago. His family immigrated to Thailand to the former Yao village of Doi Mae Salong (near the K.M.T. Fifth Army headquarters). When the Mae Salong village split up, they moved to the Yao village of Fongpakhem, then to the Liso/Haw village of Pangsa, and finally to the hills over the river Hue’bang, about one mile away from the present village site. At 22 years of age, Lao Tsi Kwe became village headman; the village at that time comprised about seven houses.

He decided to move the village to the lower ground between the two rivers and buy an area of rough ground over the Mae Chan river, with an eye to turning it into wet-rice fields. He bought it for about 150 baht, and then sold it off in plots to the other householders.

Since then the village has grown, as other householders have joined it migrating directly from Laos or from other nearby Yao village sites. It presently comprises 23 *hyan*; the twenty-third came this year from Nang Waen.

Kwe’s own version of why he decided to move to this new site is as follows: ‘‘I saw how the Khonmuang made a living [i.e. as wet-rice farmers] and decided to do the same.’’ In other respects, the new site is not a particularly good choice. In the rainy season the village is plagued by mosquitoes which breed in the swampy ground around the two rivers. Also, unlike most Yao villages, this one has no nearby water source on the hillside above, so they cannot run water from house to house in bamboo conduits. Instead, they have to rely on two wells dug for them by the Thai authorities, and, in the dry season, river water. Obviously the villagers were prepared to sacrifice a lot for the sake of having wet-rice fields.

The development of the ricefields, however, is proceeding very slowly. Only one third of the total area is workable at present. The rest of the fields are still uncleared, or have an insufficient water supply. (A tractor was promised from the agricultural centre near Chiang Rai [?] to help in clearing the rough ground, but did not turn up before the start of the rainy season.) Sporadic work is going on in digging a drainage ditch from the Mae Chan, and in digging out stumps and boulders and breaking up the soil with hoes. The headman has made a

wooden plough—an art he learnt from the Khonmuang—and has borrowed 2,000 baht to hire water buffaloes to haul it.

Conversion to other religions. Many of the Yao in Baan Lao Tsi Kwe are nominally Buddhist. Tsi Kwe has been given a couple of gold Buddha images to hang round his neck, but he says “I don’t really understand what it’s all about. Do you know?” At present, three 15-year-olds from the village are novices at Wat Soi Soda in Chiang Mai—they return to help, however, with farm work during peak work-times: for example, they look after the animals in the dry season when their parents are preparing the fields, and only return to Chiang Mai when the rice has been planted.

I have conducted a census in the village, from which the total population, its distribution and the composition of the individual households may be assessed.

Notes on the census

I usually haven’t put the tones in: there are eight, and I don’t always hear them right. There is some point in knowing names and surnames: surnames because you aren’t meant to marry into your own (or your mother’s) surname category. But since I mostly don’t know mothers’ surnames, I can’t get final statistics on technical incest in the village. More importantly, the Yao name their children “1st son”, “1st daughter”, etc.—so you should be able to tell how many children have died or left home by spotting the gaps. But perhaps they don’t always adhere to that. Yao systems of naming are very complicated.

The economic data are, of course, rounded numbers for an average year (and probably deliberately underestimated, if the headman is anything to go by). All the same they do give some idea of the range between rich and poor in the village. And the over-all impression, that most are very poor indeed, is a correct one, I think.

I am quite keen on this technique, and thought of doing the same in the nearest Khonmuang village and the remoter, still right up in the hills, Yao village. I think you need to combine formal questionnaires and informal chat over a longish period of residence to help you get a bit nearer the truth. (But I don’t mean to imply that they are lying their heads off—some of the data can be cross-checked, and are roughly right. But, e.g. no mention of silver in the ground and especially sales of opium. The headman, when he was showing how poor he was, said that he had 10 *rai* of maize; when he was grumbling about how hard he has to work—which is true, mind you—he said 20.)

The way I took this census was to go around from house to house with the headman, who was a Yao-Thai interpreter. But most of the Yao men and some of the women can speak Central Thai, and all speak “Kham Muang” (the local dialect). But the headman was more likely to get at the truth than I. I know enough Yao now to understand some of the conversations. The less you use an interpreter the better, I think, though it obviously speeds things up. Apart from anything else their English usually isn’t much good, and as soon as you use an interpreter a bit you start to give up trying to learn yourself.

HOUSEHOLD CENSUS RESPONSES

[SHEET 1]

Code No.:	1	2	3
Householder	Yao Fong Sē Phan	Tsan Tsoy Se Wang	Tsan Kwan Se Wang
Age	57	35	35
Wife	Mwang Myang Sē?	Nai Seng Se Wang	1. Fé Hwan Sē Phan 34
Age	52	41	2. Faam Huan Sē Fong 19
Children	1. Kao Fong m. 25 2. Sān Fong m. 22 3. Nai Fong f. 21 (4. Faam Fong. f. married outside village) 5. Sū Fong m. 5 6. Ū Fong m. 13 7. Mā Fong f. 11 8. Lū Fong m. 7	1. Kao Tsoy m. 15 2. Nai Tsoy m. 12 3. Saan Tsoy m. 10 4. Sū Tsoy m. 7 5. Mwang Tsoy f. 4 6. Kē Tsoy m. 2	1. Kwai Kwan f. 18 2. Muang Kwan f. 13 3. Nai Kwan f. 12
Ext. Fam.	Ch. of 3 Kao Nay m. 11 mths.	H U Y B Tsan Fe 29 W. Fām Tso 26 Ch. 1. Mwang Fo f. 7 2. Nay Fo f. 4 3. Kao Fo m. 3 4. Fām Fo f. 1 H U F Tung Fé 66 M W Kē Tsiang 55	Ch. of 1. Fé Kwan f. 2 Y 2 i) Mai Kwé 20 ii) Lai Kwé 18 H U M Yen Seng Se Phan 52
Wet-rice fields?	Yes, but not enough water to work them.	None.	Yes—but not cleared yet.
Rai: hill rice (approx.)	15	15	10
Rai: maize (approx.)	10	10	10
No. pigs	9	20	20
No. chickens	5	15	30
Other livestock	0	0	0
Grow enough rice to feed household?	Yes	No	No
No. to feed	11	16	10
Workers	4	5	5
Cash earnings p.a.	2,000 Bht	2,500 Bht	4,000 Bht
Cash expenditure p.a.	5,000 Bht	6,000 Bht	7,000 Bht
Other comments		Tsan Tsoy (HL) FOBS Tsan Kwan (HL 3) Son 1. educ. Chiang Rai	Headman (Tsi Kwé) 2. educ. Mae Chan Witayakhon School Wife 2. daughter H'M no 4.?

[SHEET II]

Code No.:	4	5	
Householder	Tsun W3n Se Fong	Tung Dzân Se Wang	Sêng Tso
Age	38	52	4
Wife	Yen Fú	Tsiap Dso	Nay Hyār
Age	39	48	4
Children	1. Kao W3n m. 28 2. San W3n m. 22	1. Tsi Dzân m. 28 2. San Dzân m. 25 3. Sũ Dzân m. 23 4. Nai Dzân f. 18 5. Ū Dzân m. 16 6. Lũ Dzân m. 14 7. Pã Dzân m. 8	1. Kao T 2. Nai T 3. Muang
In-married spouses	1. = Mwang Lwang 27	1. = Nai Liw 25	1. = Faar Fong
Grandchildren	1. (of 1.) Mwang Sêng 4	1. (of 1.) Sân Luang m. 3	1. (of 1.) Mua 2. Nyin 3. Khé
Siblings Parents			
Wet-rice fields?	4.2 <i>rai</i> - "use rainwater only" i.e. no irrigation ditch	4.2 <i>rai</i>	7 (see be
<i>Rai</i> : hill rice	5 ("bad land")	5	
<i>Rai</i> : maize	10	10	10
No. pigs	10	20	13
No. chickens	15	15	20
Water buffaloes	2	3	0
Horses	0	1	0
Grow enough rice for own consumption?	No	Yes	No
No. to feed	6	11	9
Workers (full-time)	3	6	4
Cash income <i>p.a.</i>	2,000 Bht ("at best")	4,000 Bht	3,000 Bh
Expenditure <i>p.a.</i>	4,000 Bht	7,000 Bht	5,000 Bh
Additional comments		1. Many men in this household, so they eat a lot and need a lot of clothes. 2. Estimated <i>rai</i> of paddy as 5— ? officials figure 4.2 more credible. (Gave 5 as round no.) 3. Child 6 novice at Wat Soi Soda (?) (Chiang Mai)	

[SHEET III]

Code No.:	7	8	9
Householder	Tung Nyān Se Wang	Tung Nyen Se Wang	Tung Pu Se Wang
Age	48	36	31
Wife	Muang Sēng Se Wang	Mwé Pu Se Phan	Mwé Khyum Se Wang
Age	46	35	32
Children	1. Lū Nyān m. 25 2. Nāi Nyān m. 19 3. (Mwé Nyān f. married lives in Naung Waem?) 4. Sān Nyān m. 17 5. Nāi Nyān f. 14 6. Lai Nyān f. 4	Mwé Nyen f. 18 Nai Nyen m. 15 Mwang Nyen f. 3	Mwé Pu f. 11 Nai Pu f. 8 Yian Pu f. 5 Nai Pu m. 3 Faam Pu f. 1
In-married spouses	1 = Ten Hyaang 25 (this village)		
Grandchildren	i. Kao hin m. ii. Muang hin f. iii. Nāi hin f. } twins iv. Nāi hin m. } v. Lao sān hin m.		2 Akha (?) wage labourers/lodgers
Others			
Wet-rice fields?	7 rai	4.2 rai	17 rai
Rai: hill rice	—	—	—
Rai: maize	—	10	10
Other crops	10 rai peanuts	—	—
No. pigs	23	10	10
No. chickens	20	5	20
Water buffaloes	3	4	1
Horses	1	—	—
Grow enough rice for own consumption?	No	Yes	Yes
No. to feed	13	5	9
Workers	4	3	4
Cash income p.a.	4-5,000 Bht	2,000 Bht	5-6,000 Bht
Expenditure p.a.	8,000 Bht	4,000 Bht	"more"
Et cetera	Nikhom (?) map gives wet-rice fields as 2 plots of 4.2 rai each, but also indicates all but approx. 2 rai not yet cleared. Same name—same surname—live as neighbours—presume siblings?	4 children died at about 2 yrs. old of a disease (TB?) Own estimate of wet rice—5 rai.	Labourer/lodgers paid 600 Bht p.a. for cigarettes, etc. and food. Sold horses when wet-rice fields were cleared—horses mainly used for carrying tools and food to remote hill fields. About 2 rai of 17 wet-rice still unclear-ed. Owns rice-husking machine, bought Ch.R about 5,000 Bht. Rents to other villagers.

[SHEET IV]

Code No.:	10	11	12
Householder	Seng Khian Se Chow		(Twung?)
Age	27		Tung Hin Sē Wang 50
Wife	Tsan Meng Se Le	Muang Hin Se Chow	Faam Tyaang Se Chow
Age	27	40	54
Children	1. Kao Khiam 2 2. 3.	Tsing Tsiang m. 20 San Tsiang m. 10	Su Hin m. 23 U Hin m. 19 Lu Hin m. 14
In-married spouses			2. = Faam Fong Se Phan m. 19
Grandchildren	1. 2.		Kao Khian m. 4 } Muang Khian f. 2 } "had already" (before marriage)
Siblings	YB Nai Gwin 15 YZ Mwang Gwin 12		
Parents	Kwé Gwen Se Chow 54 (HUF)		
Grandparents	HUFM 70+		
Wet-rice fields?	Yes, but not enough water (also uncleared); 3 <i>rai</i>	—	Yes, but not enough water: 16 <i>rai</i> .
Rai: hill rice	12	10	10
Rai: maize			10
No. pigs	10	13	6
No. chickens	11	6	20
Water buffaloes	—	—	—
Horses	—	—	—
Grow enough rice for own consumption?	No	Yes	No
No. to feed	7	3	8
Workers	3	2	3
Cash income p.a.	2,000 Bht	1,000 Bht	3,000 Bht
Expenditure p.a.	3,000 Bht	2,000 Bht	"If not enough rice to eat we have to borrow."
Et cetera	No discrepancy between 2nd name householder and younger siblings. Either my faulty hearing (Khiam and Gwin phonetically quite near) or because they are in fact cousins — (No.3) L.S.K. refers to the brothers in No. 2. as "elder brothers" (in Thai) while they are in fact FeBS. Interesting to see if Yao kinship terminology can have equally broad spectrum re. "elder and younger sibling" or if he is translating to a different way of assessing kinship relations.	Widow	Wet-rice fields not cleared either.

[SHEET V]

Code No.:	13	14	15
Householder	Tsan Fow Se Phan	Jan Kuan Se Phan	Tung Kuan Se Wang
Age	33	34	33
Wife	Faam Kwang Se Wang	Tsing Hin Se Wang	Nai Tso Se Phan
Age	28	28	28
Children	1. Kao Fow m. 4 2. Nai Fow m. 9 mths. 3. 4. 5.	Kao Kuan m. 12 Muang Kuan f. 9 Tsing Kuan m. 4 Faam Kuan f. 2 Fé Kuan f. 1 mth.	Kao Kuan m. Sân Kuan m. 31 Sû Kuan m. 1 May Kuan f. 9 (bought child)
In-married spouses			
Grandchildren	i) Tsam Tsow m. 22 ii) Fay Tsow f. 18 iii) Sû Tsow m. 15 iv) Muang Tsow f. 12		
Siblings			
Siblings children	a) (of ii) Kao Fé m. 3 b) Mnang Fé f. 1		
Parents	(M) Lai Sing 50	(M) Man Kuan	
Wet-rice fields?	None	None	None
<i>Rai</i> : hill rice	10	10	10
<i>Rai</i> : maize	12	10	7
No. pigs	20	5	8
No. chickens	10	2	10
Water buffaloes	2	2	—
Horses	2	—	—
Grow enough rice for own consumption?	No	No	Yes
No. to feed	11	8	6
Workers	4	2	2
Cash income p.a.	2,000 Bht	1,000 Bht	2,000 Bht
Expenditure p.a.	5,000 Bht	3,000 Bht	4,000 Bht
<i>Et cetera</i>	Two children died, two have married and left home. YB (sibling ii) novice at Wat Soi Soda, Chiang Mai.		Not sure of ethnic group of bought child, think Yao. Wife is YZ of householder 14 (Jan Kuan).

[SHEET VI]

Code No.:	16	17	18
Householder	Kao hin Sē Wang	Kwé Lyāng Se Phan	Kao Li Se Li
Age	33	56	34
Wife	1. Liw Sing Se Phan 39	Liw Tso Se Phan	Nui Wun Se Li
Age	2. Mi Yaa 18	53	32
Children	1. Tsing Lyaang f. 8	Lū Hyāng m. 34	Tsan Kian m. 15
	2.	Sān Hyāng m. 26	Mwang Kian f. 10
	3.	Nai Hyāng m. 21	Tseng Jian m. 7
	4.	Fé Hyāng f. 20	Sān Kian m. 4
	5.	Lyū Hyāng f. 16	Sū Kian m. 2
	6.	Ké Hyāng f. 9	
In-married spouses	a.	= 1 Fuy Fú 31	
	b.	= 2 Liw Fé Se Wang 23	
Grandchildren	i.	(of 1) May Kwé f. 12	
	ii.	Lai Kwé m. 5	
	iii.	Fān Kwé f. 9	
	iv.	(bought Akha child)	
	v.	(of 2) Yang Lin f. 4	
	vi.	Kao Lin m. 3	
Siblings		Nuy Lin f. 1	
Parents		OB Kwé Tsoy 62	WF Tsan Huan 60
Wet-rice fields?	None	None	None
Rai: hill rice	10	20	8
Rai: maize	7	20	18
No. pigs	8	20	4
No. chickens	10	30	8
Water buffaloes	—	—	—
Horses	—	5	—
Household self-sufficient in rice?	No	Yes	No
No. to feed	4	18	8
Workers	2	6	2
Cash income p.a.	5,000 Bht	3,000 Bht	500 Bht
Expenditure p.a.	5,000 Bht ("unless someone has to go to hospital")	8,000 Bht	2,000 Bht
Et cetera	2nd wife Akha—no Yao name as yet. House-owner is Christian (as is elder brother) in village but unidentified as yet.	2 children died. 2 left home.	Note different 2nd name of children—L.S.K. pointed it out and explained "there are 2 second names in this family". Se Li is an unusual surname (L.S.K) Son 1 is novice in Wat Soi Soda. Ch.R. Entry "Household self-sufficient in rice" was phrased "enough rice to eat?" here emphatically "not enough rice to eat every year"—but in other cases a bigger cash income. Obviously choice made to concentrate on cash crops at expense of self-sufficiency

[SHEET VII]

Code No.:	19	20	21
Householder	Nai Tso Se?	Nai Kwé Hyaang	Tsun Tso Se Fong
Age	49	Se Chow 48	58
Wife		Yian Tsoy Se Wang	May Tsiang Se?
Age		50	56
Children	1. Fay Púq f. 32 2. San Púq m. 9	Nai Hyāng m. 22 Sān Hyāng m. 15	Nying Tso f. 20 Fām Tso f. 9
In-married spouses		= 1 Faam Hyāng Se	
Grandchildren	i. (of 1) Kao Fay m. 8 ii. Nying Fay f. 2	Phan 22 Mwang Puq f. 6. (bought Khon- muang child) Mey Puq f. 2.	(of 1) May Nying f. 1
Others	—	—	—
Wet-rice fields	None	4 <i>rai</i> not enough water.	4 <i>rai</i>
Rai: hill rice	5	7	5
Rai: maize	18	7	5
No. pigs	1	6	10
No. chickens	0	10	3
Water buffaloes	0	0	2
Horses	0	0	4
Self-sufficient in rice?	Yes	No	Yes
No. to feed	5	7	5
Workers	1	3	1
Cash income <i>p.a.</i>	500 Bht	3,000 Bht	2,000 Bht
Expenditure <i>p.a.</i>	1,000 Bht	5,000 Bht	4,000 Bht
<i>Et cetera</i>	Surprising self- sufficiency in rice?	Eldest son village school-teacher, tra- ined in government -sponsored scheme. No pay yet, still trainee in village should get 450 Bht per month salary. Note different 2nd names of grandchil- dren.	

[SHEET VIII]

Code No.:	22	23
Householder	Wen Siaw Se Tang	Koy Fuq Se Wang
Age	55	40
Wife	Muang Tsi Se	
Age	53	
Children	1. Tsan Siaw m. 23 2. Man Siaw f. 17 3. 4.	Nay Tsoy f. 15 Nay Tsoy m. 14 Tsü Tsoy f. 6 Ching Tsoy f. 1
Others	—	—
Wet-rice fields	None	None
Rai: hill rice	7	10
Rai: maize	10	5
No. pigs	2	0
No. chickens	0	0
Water buffaloes	0	0
Horses	0	0
Self-sufficient in rice?	No	No
No. to feed	4	5
Workers	2	2
Cash income p.a.	0 (hope 2,000 Bht when rai harvested)	500 Bht
Expenditure p.a.	3-4,000 Bht	2,000+ Bht
Et cetera	Have come from Laos recently ("don't want to serve in the army and fight own relatives"). Rai have not yet produced first harvest.	Widow — moved this year from Baan Lao Sip (Amphoe Mae Chan). Think CZ of Kao Hin Sē Wang (householder no. 16) Christian. (Fuq alternative, second name.)

6. "Forbidding the leaves" — 10 days after (4)

A festival for the spirits of the leaves of the forest, to make sure that they do not do any harm

Initiation rites

Ritual rank in the spirit world is obtained by the performance of initiation rites. There are three rites, corresponding to three levels of initiation: "Kwaa tang", "To' Tsay" and "Dja tse". Of those I have only witnessed Kwaa tang, which is the lowest level rite, in Baan Mae Yao, Amphoe Muang. The rites always take place in the cold season, from December to February. This is a slack agricultural period, falling between the rice harvest and the beginning of the hot season, when opium is harvested and the hill fields are marked out, then cleared and burned off. Most marriages and important ceremonies for the spirits take place during this period, which ends with the New Year celebrations. ("Yao New Year" takes place on the same three days as "Chinese New Year", and is followed by an extra four days of "making merit for the ancestors".)

The ceremony lasted four days. Expenditure on whisky, pigs, chicken and opium for the spirits and the guests, and on the fees for the four spirit doctors, was about 2,000 baht. As this was an important ceremony, requiring the recitation of numerous texts in Mandarin Chinese, the big spirit doctor of the area, Sun Tsoy, from the government *nikhom* settlement, was employed to read the more difficult texts and direct the proceedings. All four dressed in ceremonial robes for the occasion.

The sacred paintings of the spirit government were displayed above the altar shelf. They are only brought out on special occasions such as these. There was also a full Iu Mien orchestra of drums, gong, cymbals and oboe. On the large altar-table, specially brought for the occasion and set up beneath the portraits of the Faam Tsing, were the carcass of a sacrificial pig, a bag of unhusked rice (the *sikien*), bottles of whisky and whisky cups, piles of "spirit money" as well as the ritual objects when not in use; the spirit doctor's horn, two "dragon steeds" (wooden sticks with iron heads and tips, and dragons painted curling round them), two bells, the oracle sticks, the sacred knife rattle, the spirit doctor's robes, the robes the initiands will later wear, and the 'spirit house' made of wood and decorated with strips of brightly coloured paper.

For two days before the festival, and during the first three days of the festival, the initiands and the spirit doctors are not allowed meat or sexual intercourse.

The first three days are basically preparation—the Faam Tsing, the government and the ancestors are addressed, and whisky is poured out for them. (N.B.: this is in keeping with the Yao method of driving business deals in day-to-day life. For example, when a customer comes to buy opium, he is given tea and a waterpipe, and there is up to one hour of pleasant gossip and polite enquiries as to the customer's general health and wealth before business is actually broached.) Compliments are exchanged between the spirit doctors, as well—on the second day the minor spirit doctors say how honoured they are to be working with Sun Tsoy, and thus

to have the opportunity of increasing their knowledge and skill at their profession. On the afternoon of the third day, Sun Tsoy likewise says how honoured he is to attend the ceremony, how happy he feels and how he is sure that all is going well, now that the latter parts of the initiation rites are about to begin. The singing is accompanied by percussion, and is interspersed by improvisations on the oboe. The spirit doctors and assistants sometimes sing in a line facing the altar and 'kowtowing' at intervals, sometimes in a circle, doing a slow, swaying dance. Some of the songs are improvised, but most are read from sacred texts written in Chinese characters.

The main part of the ceremony takes place on the evening and night of the third day. The candidates for initiation are dressed in women's clothes, and sit on the spirit houses, facing the altar. Three candles, which I have been told represent the three vital life spirits, and on another occasion three eyes, are placed in a bamboo container and stood in front of each candidate. The spirit doctors chant to the supernaturals, and burn spirit money; they and the candidates kowtow to the altar at frequent intervals. The chanting is done in relays, with two spirit doctors working at once; sometimes assistants, who can read the text in question, fill in for them. The spirit doctors consult the oracle sticks to determine when the supernaturals are satisfied. At dawn the next day, the immediate families (parents, children and spouses) of the candidates kneel behind them, and the big spirit (doctor) scatters rice over them and the candidates and blesses them. The candidates change to their normal clothes, and the candles are blown out. Until the early afternoon the spirit doctors and assistants sing and dance in pairs or all together—sometimes two spirit doctors perform an intricate dance, twirling their dragon staffs. Finally all the spirit money and the spirit houses are set on fire—the spirit doctors disrobe, and the altar is dismantled. Last of all, the sacred paintings are taken down and returned to their wrappings.

A large number of guests attend. At each mealtime about 30 people are fed off the flesh of the sacrificial pigs and chickens, and given whisky to drink. At all times there are a number of guests sitting around drinking tea and chatting, or lying on the sleeping platform smoking opium.

Unfortunately, my understanding of the ceremony is incomplete, due to my imperfect command of Thai at the time that I was attending. However, there are certain aspects of the ritual described above that deserve further comment and a tentative interpretation.